

Till We Meet Again

A Reflection on Grief and the Hope of the Resurrection

Reflections Reflections The Scroll, June 2021

Revelation 14:13

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

It has been quite some time since we published an edition of our church newsletter. Like everything else in this world, the mysterious virus Corona threw our schedules and plans into a spin. We were looking for an appropriate theme, and decided that Covid-19 is certainly not the one. Much is said about it by all and sundry; we have nothing to add. While we were wondering about God's plan for us, we realised that, one after another, a number of our church members went to be with Jesus in rapid succession. The editorial team decided to celebrate the lives of all those co-worshippers and friends as a tribute to them.

As I got older, I concluded that there is a relationship between the maturity of my faith and how I handle suffering. You see, it is when we face suffering that the level of our faith in God, and our relationship with Him, is revealed. All of us know someone whose faith has been devastated because of suffering in their life. If we are going to grow and mature, sooner or later we are going to have to come to grips with the issue of suffering. We are going to have to move from a level where we ask 'why' to a level where we understand the realities of suffering. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul shares how he came to grips with his own suffering. What Paul reveals in this passage is not so much the reason for suffering, but rather the realities of suffering. Let us move on.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."
(Revelation 14:13)

Some may want to argue that the martyrs, those who have suffered death for the name and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, are in consideration here, and that these are the persons more especially intended in the above verse. They are, therefore, those who die in the Lord, or for the Lord, for His sake, in defence of His cause, and to bear testimony to the truth of His Gospel, though there does not appear sufficient reason to determine that these are the only persons intended here.

I like to interpret the words more generally, as including not only confessors and martyrs, but all good Christians, who died in the Lord — that is, in the faith of the Lord Jesus, united with Him, seeking the mercy of God through Him.

Being in Christ is peculiar to good people, good Christians, and is certainly descriptive of their character as such. Though the lives and deaths of all our friends who have gone to be with Jesus may not, at the outset, qualify as martyrdom for the sake of Christ, all the narratives we read about them tell us that they certainly would qualify as good Christians. All of them, in their given circumstances in their lives, had

kept Christ central to their lives, and did their bit for the Kingdom of Jesus. They, I am sure, would enter the blessedness of Christ, and rest in peace for eternity.

I am unable to accept the doctrine that their spirits go to a place of purgation, to be cleansed for a paradisaic state. I also do not believe that they 'sleep' with their bodies, until the general resurrection.

If we may give credit to the revelations of Scripture, there is no room for doubt that the soul survives the funeral of the body; nor can it reasonably remain a question or doubt. In that sense, all those who die in the Lord, believing and trusting in Him, should immediately pass into His glory. Paul certainly thought those good people were happy, and in the eternal peace of the Lord, instantly upon their death. To die is 'gain'; to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and to depart hence is to be with Christ, which is by far better than to abide in the flesh, which sin and decay.

Let the lives of all our friends serve as a beacon for us. As the works of good Christians follow them into God's Kingdom, let us all labour to abound therein. Our good deeds, done in faith and love, focused only on Christ, and for His glory, are the only things we can carry with us into the new creation of Jesus. And the more, and better, our works have been, the greater and more glorious will our reward be.

Anand Peter